

## **ANNA ELISABETH LARSEN PORTER**

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My parents, Hal and Jane Larsen, purchased our home in 1955 on Kurtz Road in McLean's new Salona Village neighborhood. They moved there to be closer to the CIA where my dad worked, as did most of the dads in our neighborhood. Our subdivision was carved out of the Salona estate which was subdivided after Calder Gilliam Smoot died in 1952. Our home was, and still is, on Kurtz Road. Kurtz was the maiden name of Jennie Kurtz, the wife of William Sothoron Smoot. All of the streets in our neighborhood were named for members of the Smoot family.

I was born in 1958 in the George Washington University Hospital which has since been torn down. I take a lot of photographs, but never got out there to take a picture of it. It never occurred to me to do so. Putting ideas to paper is another way of remembering. My mother used shorthand until the day she died. It was a good way for her to take notes for me not to see. Few have any idea what shorthand is today and my generation saved things in writing that the next generation doesn't understand because we wrote in cursive.

My father was called for an overseas "tour of duty" in 1960. We spent four years in Germany where my father worked at the American Embassy in Bonn. We rented out our house on Kurtz Road at \$190.00 per month. Laughlin Realty handled everything while we were away. I think \$190.00 was a lot to pay to rent a house back then. My younger brother Anders was born in Germany and had to be naturalized once we returned to America.

We've had the same phone number over the years since our return to McLean in 1964. I am on a Facebook group which looked up our phone number before 1960. It was a different number, but still had the 356 Elmwood digits. Our original address was a rural route: Route 1, Box 111A, then changed to Route 3, Box 183. While we were in Germany things changed and we had a street address: 4813 Kurtz Road. This later changed and today it's 1314 Kurtz Road, and has been since 1965.

My family is Catholic, so I was baptized in 1958 at St. John's Catholic Church down on Linway Terrace not long after I was born. I went to school at St. John's from first grade through eighth grade. For high school, I attended Bishop Denis J. O'Connell in Arlington, but I had friends who attended Langley. I remember the air raid drills during my earlier years at St. John's. We went into a basement-like room underneath a grassy hillside. This was a room used to store desks. I will never forget the noon-day whistle that went off every day from the firehouse far down the road in McLean. We could hear it at St. John's. I don't know why it sounded each day at noon, I never thought to ask, but it had a different tone than that of a fire truck. I guess this was so that people would know the difference. One of the most frightening experiences I recall as a child was first seeing smog. We stood on top of a hill by the school overlooking the "valley" where we played, and looked toward Washington. There were no houses behind Saint John's then so we could see to the end of the horizon. It was very dirty. This view was very scary to me.

The original church building was built in 1913 facing Carlin Lane, but in 1957 St. John's built its "church in the 'round;" it is completely round. The school building was constructed in 1954. I was born just a year after the new church was built. My mom was in the choir at Saint

John's and I have a wonderful photo of her singing at the dedication of the new church. Church life and our school life were very interconnected. I learned to play the guitar and later played for the 5:00 p.m. folk mass. It was kind of a thing back then to have a folk mass because folk music was so popular. I even took guitar lessons at the YMCA that operated in a white house behind the medical building at 1515 Chain Bridge Road. I was about ten years old. If you drive by the church in the spring, you can see the beautiful azaleas all around the church property. They were planted by Father Rogman sometime in the 1950s and they still bloom beautifully today.

While growing up, I loved to ride horses and took riding lessons at various farms in the area, the first one being Storm's farm on Magarity Road. At one time, this was a dairy farm, but I don't know if there were still cows there then. I only had eyes for the horses. The farm went from Magarity Road all the way to Route 123. Generally, the horses were pastured toward the Magarity side where the barn was located. However, sometimes when going down Route 123 in the car with my parents, I could see the horses in the distance and I often saw the horse I rode during my lessons. There was a little creek that went through the pasture. It is still there amid all the development if you know where to look. I took riding lessons for several years at various places, but I started at Storm's farm.

Eventually I got my own horse and boarded him at Admiral Beverly Coleman's farm off Georgetown Pike. Admiral Coleman was the grandson of Colonel John Mosby of Civil War fame. He lived in a beautiful stone house and his driveway came in off Balls Hill Road. He had a farm manager who took care of the property and collected the rent. To the east, the Mackall family had already subdivided their property into a subdivision called Langley Forest. An older white farm house remained on Lawton Street where my friend Laurie Riley lived. It is still there today. A couple of years ago I drove by and took a picture of it to send to Laurie who no longer lives in the area. There was the beginning of a road that was stopped by a gate at Lawton Street. When the Coleman property was developed into the Balmacara subdivision that road became Holyrood Drive. I remember the windmill near the eastern edge of his property. It was near the riding ring. There were few windmills left in McLean at this time. It stood among rolling hills, lush green pasture, and buttercups. There was a fence along Georgetown Pike to keep the horses in, but a person could get into the pasture from a spot across from St. Luke Catholic Church. Actually, there were three pastures across from the church. Two were connected so that the horses could go back and forth. The fence was kept for a long time along the Pike after the fields were gone.

One of the main things I treasure about living in the Salona Village neighborhood was playing in the woods around the Salona estate. Even though Salona had been subdivided, a good deal of property remained surrounding the historic house. As kids we never cared about property lines; we simply went where we wanted. We played in the Salona woods. Clive and Susan DuVal, the owners of Salona after the Smoots, were wonderful people who embraced the community. There were a lot of out-buildings on the property that weren't used anymore. One was made of stone. We pretended that it was a Civil War fort. The Union Camp Griffin was built on Salona property during the early stages of the Civil War, but I'm pretty sure the building was just a former outbuilding for the main house; perhaps a barn or summer kitchen. The big rock seen in a Civil War photograph of Camp Griffin is still in front of the Pickeral's house on Kurtz Road. We climbed all over it. Again, we didn't really understand that it was on somebody's property; we just made ourselves at home. The rock has English Ivy all over it now and is hard to see.

Growing up when I did, we really had our freedom. We could do whatever we wanted. It was not that our parents didn't care, but they were not helicopter parents. We went out all day, did our own thing, and fixed our own problems. I feel that it made our generation more able to cope with life's problems. If you get into a scrape, you fix it yourself. I'm glad to have learned that way. I ran around in the woods and it was just a wonderful freedom that kids of today don't have.

We often rode our horses at what is now Scott's Run Nature Preserve. This was the Burling Tract that the community fought so hard to keep. We simply called it Burling because it was owned by a Washington lawyer, Edward Burling. Again, it was private property. There were trails, a waterfall, and a pool of water to swim in. As kids, we would hang out there and some even rode dirt bikes. At that time there were also trails behind Langley High School which everyone frequented. I was able to ride my horse all over McLean, even down Route 123. Sully, my horse, was sold in 1975. I was in high school, had a job, a boyfriend, and didn't have the time to devote to a horse as I should. He was beautiful.

A good deal of my summer time was spent at the Langley Swim and Tennis Club. My parents were founding members. I learned to swim there. It was always crowded. People just don't go to swimming pools like they used to. One of the life guards drove an old hearse. All the kids loved it. I thought it was creepy. The Good Humor man came around every day and we always ran out to meet him.

Dr. Richard Mulvaney was my first doctor. There were no pediatricians in McLean then and he was the doctor for our whole family. Dr. Mulvaney was also a member of St. John's Church and his kids also went to St. John's School. One of his sons, Michael, was in my grade. His office was by the old Safeway across from the Franklin Sherman School. That's probably why he was picked to deliver the first polio shot. He inoculated students at Franklin Sherman with the Salk polio vaccine in 1954. Of course, this was before I was born. I then had Dr. Enrico Davoli and Dr. Joseph Evers who were in practice together. Dr. Evers also went to my church. These two doctors couldn't have been more different. Dr. Evers looked like a Kennedy and Dr. Davoli looked like a beatnik. He didn't dress like a doctor. He wore love beads, etc. He made you feel comfortable. Everybody loved both of them. They were wonderful doctors to a whole generation (or two) of McLean children, and, interestingly enough, they died within three months of each other, in 2017.

My dentist was Dr. Charles "Chuck" Wissler, another wonderful person, whose practice was an office beside his home on Balls Hill Road. He was a large, imposing man but so very kind and funny, cracking jokes all of the time. He made a little girl feel a lot less nervous about going to the dentist. Dr. Wissler had a velvet board with lots of finger rings on it and, if you were good, you could pick one. I remember the first time I rode my bike there all by myself. It made me feel so grown up. He retired in 2007 and died unexpectedly two weeks after that.

My dad loved photography and took lots of photos since he was a child. He was a World War II photographer. In 1966 he went around McLean and took several pictures, followed by a few in 1979 because there was a severe blizzard. They are now a good record of what McLean used to look like.

My mother volunteered with the “Music in McLean” concert series held at St. Luke’s Catholic Church. These were free concerts and anyone could attend. She was in charge of the media. She was also a lector at St. Luke’s. She also volunteered with S.O.M.E., a soup kitchen in Washington that serves the needs of homeless people. Both my parents enjoyed the theatre and volunteered with the Olney Theatre in Maryland. My mom also volunteered with the literacy council in Arlington, teaching conversational English to immigrants. This means teaching them what to say when opening a bank account, enrolling a child in school, etc.

My first job was at McDonald’s in 1974 when it was on Elm Street. I was a cashier and it was a fun job when my friends came in. I made \$1.90 per hour. After a couple of summers lifeguarding at different pools in Falls Church and Arlington, I waitressed at the Pizza Hut in McLean for a year. I worked with a great bunch of people and we had so much fun. One night one of the guys climbed up on the roof and changed the letters to read “Zizap Hut”. I can’t remember if we ever got in trouble. The Pizza Hut has been torn down.

My father was a career CIA agent. He was from South Dakota, and was originally going to be a teacher. But, after being in intelligence in the Army Air Corps during WWII, he changed his career plans. After retirement he was called back to work by Customs as a consultant for a few years. My mom was from Texas, and was a reference librarian for Central Library in Arlington for 41 years and did a lot of work in the College/Career section as well, including hosting a monthly presentation that was televised on the cable TV channel in which she would bring in a different speaker to talk about their career. She had some very interesting speakers throughout the years, and helped many people with their college and career choices. After retiring in 2006 to stay home and take care of my dad, she then went back to the library as a volunteer until 2012 when she was 84.

I enjoyed going to McLean’s movie theatre and was so disappointed when it closed. It’s where I first saw “Jaws”. I still love shopping at Mesmeralda’s which has been there since I was a kid. I miss Baskin Robbins, however, and I am sad there is no where in McLean to get a cone.

My life was certainly interesting, but I was most drawn to my dad’s fascination with historic canals. When I was a kid, my parents would take me along on their many hiking or biking excursions along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Towpath. They became involved in the C & O Canal Association. This was a great love of theirs. There is a section along the towpath in Western Maryland which they maintained. I don’t recall how long it was, but they went up there about every two months to check things out. After adopting this section of the towpath, they were known as “Level Walkers.” Of course, they spent more time on the canal than that, either hiking or biking. My dad was president of the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Association from 1986-1990. This is part of the National Park Service. Since it was underfunded, he used a lot of support organizations for support. Free concerts were held in Georgetown right next to the canal to raise funds. My parents helped with the crowd control. It was so amusing to me that my little five-foot tall 88-pound mother was a bouncer at concerts! When my dad stepped down as president, the vice-president and he simply changed positions, so the association continued to be run by the same persons. During his presidency, membership increased greatly. My mother was secretary and archivist at the same time.

McLean was truly a wonderful place to grow up. It was still rural enough to run and play in the woods, fields and creeks, but had a lot of advantages since we had the nation's capital city nearby. But now most everything has changed, however there are remnants of my youth if you know where to look. It no longer has that small-town feeling but there are still a lot of people there I know, and have known all my life, including some neighbors that have known my parents since the 1950's. I went to Mary Washington College (now University of Mary Washington) and enjoyed the feeling of a small town, Fredericksburg, so I moved there in 1978. I never lived in McLean again, although I never lived very far away and so I have always come home, and still do, at least once a month. Today I live in the small community of Beaverdam, Virginia. Since I lost my parents, I have taken an interest in genealogy and have taken lots of trips to reconnect with their past. I am blessed that I am able to make these trips. It really makes me feel a connection to my parents and their parents and grandparents when I can go to the towns they grew up in, see their schools, attend mass in their churches, pay my respects at their burial sites.

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